

Better Business Focus

April 2022

Expert inspiration for a Better Business



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Better Business Focus is the essential key for business owners and managers. It achieves that by focusing on the way in which successful businesses compete and manage their organisations. It focuses on how people are recruited, coached and developed; on how marketing and selling is undertaken in professional markets as well as in markets with intense competition; on how technology and the Internet is reshaping the face of domestic and home business; and on how people are being equipped with new skills and techniques. In short, it offers expert inspiration for a better business.

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Dr Lynda Shaw

Tips on how to cope before an anxiety-inducing big event



From exams to presentations to interviews, important occasions can leave us feeling overwhelmed and anxious, hindering our ability to function and perform, even to the extent of provoking panic attacks, or feelings of overwhelming exhaustion or nausea. Neuroscientist, psychologist and recalibration specialist, Dr Lynda Shaw, reveals her top 10 tips on overcoming fear before an anxiety-inducing event.

1. **Look after your wellbeing.** First and foremost in the run-up to the big occasion focus on your well-being to ensure you are the best version of yourself. Prioritise sleep and eat well so you don't feel run down or exhausted, and exercise regularly as it releases the happy hormone serotonin, which will make you feel more confident and increases the blood flow around your body. Avoid excessive alcohol, caffeine and sugar as these can also trigger anxiety, and instead enjoy whole foods, fruits and vegetables so your body is energised and well fuelled so you are ready to face your challenge. Listen to music and relax. Create a playlist that makes you feel happy and energised. When you start to feel anxious or just before the event listen to this playlist; distractions are often very useful at this point.
2. **You already know it but be prepared.** Practice makes us as close to perfect as we can be. The more we know something inside out, the more it becomes second nature. Being tuned in to yourself, using your inner resources and established neural connections and memories will all help in your performance.
3. **Question your intrusive thoughts.** Thoughts are not facts. When we recognise this we can try to avoid the vicious cycle of rumination and where our negative thoughts dictate how we feel. Ask yourself why you are worrying or fearful by trying to look at the situation as if you were talking to someone else in your shoes. Look at the advantages of trying your best and overcoming your fears and try to rationalise why things are the way they are. You can take better control if you imagine being relaxed, you will naturally slow down your breathing and your brain will respond by actually being more relaxed.
4. **Challenge yourself with kindness.** Put yourself in a micro situation where you know your anxiety may be triggered and observe how that feels. If you are fearing a presentation perhaps show it first to a trusted friend, family or colleagues, to help you feel safe about putting yourself out there making it feel more manageable and reducing catastrophic thinking. Mindfulness including practising gratitude, deep breathing or meditation can be very powerful. Imagine your fears fading away into the distance. Ask yourself do you really need to feel that afraid?
5. **Know what your triggers are and have some solutions for them.** When anxiety hits, your thoughts are often all over the place and you may feel like you can't get control of them. In this moment, write a list of your worries and then choose in whatever way to get rid of the list by aligning with 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind'. When you feel a bit calmer, write another list of why you became anxious and think of solutions to overcome it. Practise this regularly and learn to be aware of your triggers.

Separate anxiety from fear and fear from danger.

6. **Remind yourself this happens to so many people.** We often think we are the only ones in the room that is having anxious thoughts and emotions, but it's likely that you are not alone and there will be several other people feeling exactly the same as you do. Remember our external expression does not necessarily match how we feel inside. Around eight million people have anxiety in the UK, you're not alone, but you are probably a lot more resilient than you think.
7. **Ask for help.** Have someone in mind that you can text or call that you know will help you with your worry or fear. It can be as little as texting them saying "Tell me three reasons why I can do this!" This will reassure you and help block intrusive negative thoughts and make you feel more confident. Choose the right person though! A negative person could drain you or knock your confidence further.
8. **Be positive.** A positive self-fulfilling prophecy means if you believe you will do well, you are far more likely to do well and to be able to calmly face any challenges that do arise. Envisage yourself being successful and having feelings of confidence and happiness at the event. In the run-up praise yourself for how well you are doing or have some powerful positive affirmations such as 'This is going to go well because I have worked hard for it'. At the time of the event, take some deep breaths to get your mind clearly thinking and your body to slow down and remind yourself that it will be ok.

9. **Have a back-up plan.** If whatever the challenge doesn't work out as you would like, know that you always have choices. Not feeling locked into only one option helps relieve pressure and stress. Think about what else is out there for you that could be just as rewarding. With most things in life, there is also usually an opportunity to try something a second time if it doesn't work out the first time around.
10. **Nothing is ever perfect.** Remember that this one event doesn't define you and nothing is ever perfect. We are only human! You can always try again or try something different if things don't go as well as you would have liked. Any life experience (good or bad) can be a learning springboard and how we deal with things not going our way can determine our success and how we grow and prosper.

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About the Author

Dr Lynda Shaw is a cognitive neuroscientist and chartered psychologist, a Forbes contributor, an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, a Fellow of the Professional Speakers Association. as well as an entrepreneur and author of adult and children's books.

Dr Shaw has lectured in Psychology and Neuroscience at various Universities in the UK and conducted research on brain function and impairment, specialising in consciousness, emotion and the effects of ageing. She was honoured to receive the Professional Speaking Award of Excellence in October 2017, it is the highest accolade for UK speakers given by their peers.

Co-ordinates

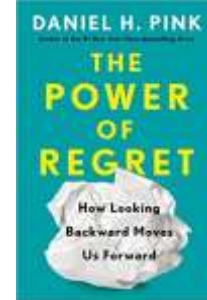
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Inspiring Business Books for 2022

The Power of Regret: How Looking Backward Moves Us Forward

By Daniel H. Pink

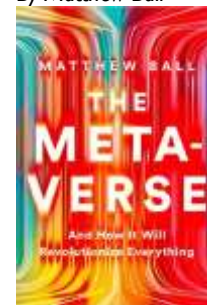


Undoubtedly one of the most anticipated business books this year coming from the #1 *New York Times*-bestselling author of *When* and *Drive*, *The Power of Regret* dissects the hidden potential of regret and how it can work to help us make more informed decisions, perform better and live a more fulfilled life. Drawing on social psychology, neuroscience and biology, Daniel H. Pink debunks the 'no regrets' mindset and helps us find a positive in every mistake we think we could have made in the past.

Buy here: <https://www.amazon.com/Power-Regret-Looking-Backward-Forward/dp/0735210659>

The Metaverse: And How it Will Revolutionize Everything

By Matthew Ball



If you haven't heard, the Metaverse is here. And it is here to stay. In his upcoming book pioneering theorist and venture capitalist Matthew Ball offers a comprehensive look at all things Metaverse – from how it will transform all industries to the ways it will reshape society as a whole. An absolutely unmissable book for absolutely everyone interested in what the future holds.

Buy here:

<https://www.amazon.com/Metaverse-How-Will-Revolutionize-Everything/dp/1324092033>



Thom Dennis

Do as I say' rather than 'do as I do' - the importance of trust in 2022

American business magnate and philanthropist Warren Buffet once said "Trust is like the air we breathe. When it's present, nobody notices. But when it's absent, everybody notices." If trust is a firm belief in the reliability and truth of someone or something, the impact of it being eroded can be huge, as we are seeing today in politics, sport and in big business. A company's or someone's reputation that has been nurtured for years, can be annihilated in just one moment of poor judgement because the emotion at the core of breaking trust is betrayal.

Trust happens over time and is built in small moments. It doesn't happen overnight. The problem is that every decision we make can increase trust or destroy it. At the moment the trust we have for people in authority is low because many of our leaders are showing their policy of 'do as I say' rather 'do as I do', but why does it matter so much in business?

The pandemic itself has impacted trust. During the heart of the pandemic, a global survey in December 2020 from The Workforce Institute at UKG * found that 60% of employees say trust has a direct impact on their sense of belonging in the workplace, but only 57% felt that they were trusted to complete daily responsibilities. Many employees are concerned about their employer monitoring their communications especially if they

are working remotely. Leaders in high trust businesses during the pandemic coached rather than micromanaged and avoided the spyware that some organisations installed on their remote working staff.

Trust is complicated. At a corporate level, studies have shown that organisations with high levels of trust have more effective leadership, better collaboration at all levels, a strong shared sense of purpose and highly value respect. The business is more productive, has better morale and lower employee turnover, which is especially important during the Great Resignation. Organisations with low trust suffer with poor inclusion, conflict, interdepartmental rivalries, misogyny and win/ lose thinking that is divisive and expensive.

Sitting on the fence, silencing employees or ignoring issues that face them, all affect trust. If you have employees who chose not to report an issue because they didn't think HR or their leaders would fix it, or because of fear of retaliation, then there is a serious breach of trust. As with employees, we have to earn our customers' and clients' loyalty and they will not be loyal until we have earned their trust. If they are not a customer with longevity, then they are still a customer with prospect.

Whatever the trust relationship in question, how can leaders build trust?

1. **Understand that trust takes time and work.** Building trust is an ongoing process that requires

reliability and commitment. The importance of trust during a merger is an excellent example of how two businesses need to have good leaders who can work together to support both of their teams become one. Equally value long term relationships, honour commitments and empower your employees and share the clear vision and the values of the company. Trust wounds can sometimes be healed but it takes a lot of active work.

2. **Trust is at the heart of an inclusive culture.** Many businesses have made public commitments to address societal disparity and have called loudly for equality and for all to be treated fairly. Many have done well to fulfil this vision but failing to meet DE&I commitments will cause damage to worker trust. Deloitte's research** in January 2022 showed that more than 40% of respondents in upper management roles (board members, C-suite/executive, and VP or director) say their organisations are *too* focused on DEI and 60% of this group believe that their organisations' commitment to DEI is likely to be reduced as different competitive threats emerge.

Worker perception reflect this as nearly 40% of total respondents, including 41% of ethnically or racially diverse respondents and 50% of LGBTQIA+ respondents, also believe that this commitment drift is likely to happen.

3. **Value trust over performance.** Trust can be a critical factor in the relationship between a worker's performance and operational success. A high performer who is not trustworthy is a toxic person likely to damage the business even if brings in the most money for now. Someone who has a slightly lower performance level but who is highly trustworthy, will always do better for the business and whilst there are no good metrics to measure someone's trustworthiness, it is very easy to spot both of these people within a business.
4. **Be vulnerable.** We need to feel trust to be vulnerable and feel vulnerable to trust. As a leader, letting your guard down at times and sharing personal anecdotes or vulnerable moments may involve taking a risk but it also gives others the opportunity to trust you too.
5. **Communication breakdowns lead to the shattering of trust.** Proper attention being given to people's views, deep listening and being non-judgmental and warm, and clear communication helps build trust. Listen more than you speak. Allow workers at all levels to feedback on their views in order to help form corporate decisions. Consistency with our words and action is key. Don't spin bad news, most people will want to hear the truth, especially stakeholders.
6. **Have an organisational higher purpose** that goes beyond making money will continue to shift to centre stage in the years to come. Adopt and stand by clear, strong company values which represent **the beliefs and principles of the business** whether that be sustainability, fairness, equality, inclusion, diversity, health, or respect for the work/life balance

and family.

7. **Great leaders care.** We expect more from leaders because they are in a position of power or authority, but authority does not create trust. Trust creates authority and we need to lead by example. How can we also trust a manager if we have no relationship or rapport with them? Good leaders are less concerned about their own status and know that their job is not to keep the customer happy but to keep their employees happy so that they in turn can make the customer happy. Happy employees feel their managers care and that they can be themselves. Employers should continue to prioritise social interactions, collaboration and teamwork when possible, in order to provide opportunities for trusting relationships to form as part of a growth mindset.
8. **Leaders need trust training.** When we start out in business we need to work hard and be good at our jobs and we get training to be even better. Once we become leaders it is assumed we know it all because we have been in the industry a while, but our job spec has entirely changed from doing the work to needing to be responsible for a team and giving away all the credit. We are no longer the person responsible for the customer, we are responsible for our team and many of us need training in that. Avoiding excessive self-promotion and focusing on acknowledging and appreciating the contributions made by others helps to build relationships.
9. **Show integrity.** If we believe our leaders have integrity then we are also likely to believe that they will always do right by us and do what is best for our business. Our moral character is shown through our evaluations, judgments, decisions and choices. Trust is built on honesty even if it means admitting mistakes and

being accountable to show integrity. Being honest, authentic, sincere, transparent and having integrity sounds a lot but actually, it comes naturally to most of us, even if we need practice and training in it. We can positively reinforce trust and gain our own and others' confidence and credibility by being generous, authentic and sincere.

10. **Don't take trust for granted.** It is a mistake to take trust for granted, and for leaders or organisations to drift off course from the commitments they made. Empowering employees has never been more important given the confusion over working from home, returning to the office and hybrid working. Keep morale high and check for burnout or mental health issues. Trust has to be worked at on a consistent basis.

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About the Author

Thom Dennis is CEO of Serenity in Leadership. He is a facilitator, speaker, consultant, change agent and educator. For the last 29 years, he has led companies dedicated to coaching executives and teams through personal and organisational change, defining strategy, working through M&As and improving communication.

With Serenity in Leadership, Thom is focusing his depth and breadth of experience to help organisations move into the 20s and all the changes that are developing. He is intent on resolving issues of inclusion to help people whoever they are, whatever background they have come from, shine and thrive, and their organisations with them.

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Jane Gunn

What choices do you have when there is a serious work dispute?



Workplace expert, Acas, estimates that workplace conflict costs UK employers £28.5 billion every year, an average of just over £1,000 for every employee, but that isn't the end to the costs of workplace conflict according to internationally renowned mediator and conflict specialist and president of The Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (CIArb), Jane Gunn. The time and energy spent on conflict resolution, sickness hours, the distraction of up to 20% of leadership time, the loss of talent through resignations and the effect on work culture is hard to quantify.

“Conflict happens in every workplace but if it can be dealt with well and early on then that has huge financial saving and social implications. It is important to have a system for managing issues or conflicts whereby the individuals involved are able to choose from a range of options or methods to try and reach a resolution. This can help us manage conflict more easily and at a much earlier stage, and so avoid the problems and cost of escalation related to entering into a formal grievance or litigation.”

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is an umbrella term for a spectrum of choices including arbitration, negotiation, deal-

making, adjudication and mediation. ADR provides an alternative method of handling legal disputes which avoids going to court and can be used as long as communication between the parties involved has not irrevocably broken down. It helps to maintain privacy around disputes by allowing them to be solved in-house, avoiding the public nature of court hearings. This keeps matters contained and confidential whilst simultaneously helping to preserve reputations and relationships.

Whilst most workplace disputes end up in an employment tribunal rather than a court of law, some alternative forms of dispute resolution (ADR) can be used at a much earlier stage.

Some forms of ADR include:

Direct negotiation – where the people involved attempt to resolve the issue between themselves using the exchange of offers and counteroffers. This is appropriate as long as they have acknowledged the problem, have not started the adversarial ‘blame game’, have the skills to resolve the issue and are prepared to devote the necessary time to do so.

Assisted negotiation – this involves a neutral facilitator for one or more parties to enable them to negotiate and to try and create as favourable an

environment as possible to reach an agreement.

Mediation – where an impartial mediator helps all parties to find a solution to the dispute which all can agree to. Decisions arising from mediation are based on mutual agreement rather than are legally binding.

Adjudication – where an independent third party makes a decision on the outcome of the dispute after considering both sides.

Arbitration – a process in which the dispute is resolved when the claimant and the other party called the respondent both put their case to an independent person called an arbitrator. Arbitration decisions are legally binding and must be followed by the parties.

Arbitration and adjudication would not usually be used for workplace disputes but are sometimes an option for commercial disputes, especially in relation to contractual issues.

Jane says “Our adversarial system and dispute resolution processes have long encouraged a culture of fear and power that has influenced every stage of commercial relationships. With the growth and recognition of conflict management systems, there is an opportunity to change the course of history in each workplace. This means starting every commercial

relationship with a framework for collaboration, which acknowledges the fundamental principles of agreement with an appropriate early accessible ADR system in place.”

Jane Gunn shares her top tips on when there is a serious work dispute in your organisation.

- 1) **Get mediators involved early** when direct, face-to-face communication between those involved is no longer possible, to try and reduce feelings of overwhelming mistrust and suspicion and not being heard before human and financial damage and costs escalate.
- 2) **Have a conflict management system in place** that starts with relationship building including mentoring, coaching, inclusive culture and informal mediation, in addition to a formal ADR system for larger disputes.
- 3) **Have a culture of collaboration**, whereby the relationship is what is most important, and differences and issues can be viewed as opportunities to renegotiate the relationship with optimism instead of fear. Creating a culture of collaboration and resolution is a long-term process.
- 4) **Understand that winning isn't everything.** We are driven by a biological urge to win because we are programmed to survive so unresolved or badly resolved conflicts can leave an uneasy feeling at best. Winning for most people is gaining the recognition that they are right, but a real win is where the matter is resolved for both or all parties.
- 5) **Accept that mindsets can't always be changed.** Two people may view a situation in totally different ways. Religious values and beliefs, life experiences, professional speciality and attitudes related to age, gender, sexuality and

race frames the picture. These mindsets tend to filter out the possibility that another person might have a valid point resulting in issues related to conflict resolution.

- 6) **Consider arbitration to resolve the dispute.** Arbitration involves calling upon a third party to serve as a judge who listens to both sides of an argument and renders a decision that they feel is most effective and appropriate for both parties. Like mediation, arbitration tends to be more cost-effective than litigation.
- 7) **Know the dispute is not the only problem** – it is just the external outpouring. There are always underlying issues when conflicts have gotten out of hand and a deep look into the culture of an organisation is vital for long term gain.

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About the Author:

Mediator, speaker and author, Jane Gunn is a former corporate lawyer. She specializes in transforming business relationships and has helped numerous companies to move from deadlock situations to opening new streams of revenue and a vibrant corporate culture.

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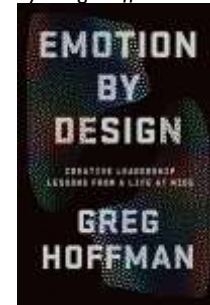


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Inspiring Business Books for 2022 (Cont'd)

Emotion By Design: Creative Leadership Lessons from a Life at Nike

By Greg Hoffman



Written by former Nike CMO Greg Hoffman, who played an important role in crafting Nike's singular brand, as well as the company's most high-profile breakthrough campaigns. In his upcoming book, Hoffman reminisces on his nearly three decades at the company, paying special attention to the power of creativity.

Buy here: <https://www.amazon.com/Emotion-Design-Creative-Leadership-Lessons-ebook/>

How to F*ck Up Your Startup: The Science Behind Why 90% of Companies Fail – and How You Can Avoid It

By Kim Hvidkjaer



An absolute must-read this year, How to F*ck Up Your Startup is a book that takes you on a journey of discovering the pitfalls that lead to the failure of 90% of companies and finding the right strategies that can help every entrepreneur to avoid or fix them.

The author Kim Hvidkjær was only 29 years old when he became a millionaire, but two years later, after a series of disasters, found himself broke. He's now rebuilt his fortune after founding several successful companies and has become an expert on failure and how to learn from it – happily sharing his top tips on it with all of us.

Buy here: <https://www.amazon.com/How-Your-Startup-Companies-Fail/dp/163774059X>



David Finkel

The real reason why you have trouble focusing at work

I have seen the scenario play out a thousand times before, your to-do list is pages long and your email box is overflowing, but yet you keep finding yourself being pulled into YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. You know deep down that you should be working on more important things, and that time is in short supply, but why do you keep getting sidetracked and playing on your phone? Is that cat video more important than your quarterly goals? Of course not! But there is a very good reason why you struggle to stay focused and on the task at work.

You Shouldn't Be Doing The Tasks On Your To-Do List

One of the biggest reasons that you have trouble focusing is because the things on your to-do list really shouldn't be there. Think about the work you did last week.

- How many hours were spent in meetings that were non-productive?
- How many emails did you answer that really didn't require any action on your part?
- How many reports did you create or read that had absolutely no impact on the bottom line?
- How many fires did you put out?
- How many hours did you spend doing office work you could pay someone \$25/hour or less to do (filing, faxing, copying, typing, shipping, cleaning, etc.)?
- How much time did you spend handling low-level requests from team members?

Deep down you know that these tasks are a waste of your time, so subconsciously you look for ways to get out of doing them. This means that you might spend hours a day on Twitter instead of working on your business. Now imagine what it would be like to come into the office and have only a few, high-level tasks on your to-do list. They would likely be challenging, thought-provoking and you would know that making progress on those items would have a positive impact on your business and your bottom line. The tasks at hand are suddenly more exciting than the latest cat video on Twitter.

Change the Way You Work

The best way to get a handle on your time and start focusing on the things that matter is to be very strategic and deliberate with the things that make it to your to-do list. Delegate and design out whenever possible, so that your list becomes more focused. Over time this should become easier and easier. If you find yourself falling into your old habits, like reaching for your phone in the middle of the afternoon, stop and review your list and see where you can make cuts. If you continue to wander, put the phone down and go for a walk instead. The mental break will do you some good, and allow you to return to your desk refreshed and ready to tackle a higher level project or task.

It will take time, but it's worth the effort. The cat videos can wait, but your business can't.

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About the Author

David Finkel is co-author of,

SCALE: 7 Proven Principles to Grow Your Business and Get Your Life Back (written with Priceline.com co-founder Jeff Hoffman), and one of the nation's most respected business thinkers. A *Wall Street Journal* and *Business Week* bestselling author of 11 business books, David's weekly business owner e-letter is read by 100,000 business owners around the world. David is the CEO of **Maui Mastermind**, one of the nation's premier business coaching companies. Over the past 20 years, David and the other Maui coaches have personally scaled and sold over \$2 billion of businesses.

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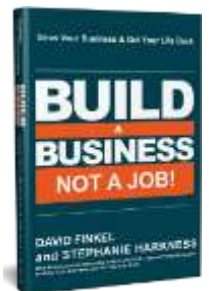
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Dr Yoram Solomon

Can you trust customer reviews?



The idea of posting and relying on customer reviews comes from the Fifth Law of Trust: trust is transferrable. The better business bureau (BBB), Amazon, Google, and many other companies use such reviews. Before you buy almost anything, download a song, go to a movie, or book a hotel room, you check reviews. You buy if you see positive reviews, and you don't buy if the reviews are bad.

But is that trust justified? Should you trust people you don't know? In this article, I will share some of the dangers of relying on customer reviews. I will also discuss other aspects of it and give you ideas on how to know if you can trust reviews and how to increase the reliability of such reviews.

Why Are Reviews Important?

When you were a child, did your parents ever tell you never to enter a car with a stranger? I bet they did. And did you? Before you answer, I have one word for you: Uber.

If your parents told you never to enter a car with a stranger, how come you do that anyway? You don't know the Uber driver, do you?

You do it because of the *Fifth Law of Trust*: Trust is transferrable. If you trust a person, and they trust another person, you are likely to trust that other person as well. Probably not as much as you trust the first person or as much as the first person trusts the other person, but more than not trusting them at all.

Fake Reviews

However, the Fifth Law of Trust doesn't come without peril. In 2018, a Sunday Riley (a skin care product company) employee leaked an email sent to all employees. In that email, the company's CEO asked the employees to post fake positive reviews of the company's products. They were given very specific instructions, such as not to use the company's VPN so that the reviews will not appear to be coming from the company's IP address, to open new email accounts with providers such as Google and Yahoo! and post the reviews from those, to use those accounts periodically and leave reviews for other products to reduce suspicion. The most outrageous comment in that email was bold and underlined: **"credibility is key to the reviews!"**

Have you ever received a package from Amazon that you never ordered, yet it had your name and address on the package? Those are part of a "brushing" scam, in which the seller of a product, to increase the visibility of the product on Amazon's site, sends the products to unsuspecting Amazon customers, and then posts reviews in their names, appearing to be posted by "verified purchasers." All they need is your name and address, which are not hard to get.



Picture Source: <https://wordpress.org/openverse/image/9054be9c-1583-4419-a934-83945be0c1f5>

Facebook alone released the fact that in 2020 they had removed 1.3 billion fake accounts, and by the third quarter of 2021, they had removed an additional 1.8 billion. Considering the above, can you trust positive reviews?

Bad Reviews

What about negative reviews? Before I buy something, I always check reviews. However, even if the product (or service) has a very high average rating, with a very large number of reviews, I check the bad reviews... Always. Do you do the same?

The reason I do that was well documented in research, and I described it in the *Positivity* component of my trustworthiness model: *bad is much stronger than good*. Research showed that there are much more (some studies claim the number to be around 3) likely to post negative reviews if we had a negative experience than to post a positive review if we had a positive experience. As a defence mechanism, we are more likely to seek out those negative reviews over positive ones.

But, there are several things to consider when reading bad reviews. The first is that some people just don't like the product, the company, or the service. Calling them "haters" might be extreme, but when I read those reviews, I can tell that there was absolutely no way that that customer would ever give a positive review. At least not for this product or company. Just like a small percentage of my students give me a bad review as a professor, even if my average rating on RateMyProfessors.com is 4.5 and 86% of the students gave me a 5-star rating. There are always a few that will give a 1-star rating for the same class.

The second reason goes to the *Personality Compatibility* component. Some people just don't see things the same way as you do. They are not haters, and they are not biased. They just value different things. Maybe they intend to use the product in a

different way than you do, and while the product excels when using it the way you intend to, it doesn't when using it the way they wanted to.

So, beware of being deterred by negative reviews, too.

How Can You Tell?

And here is the million-dollar question: how can you tell when to rely on reviews and when not to?

My first consideration in determining the answer is the sheer quantity of reviews. It's not impossible to fake a large number of reviews, but it's much harder. So, unless the product is very rare and I can't find one with many reviews, I will only consider a product with a high number of reviews.

The second consideration is *Intimacy*. Just like intimacy is important to determine another person's trustworthiness, it's important to determine the trustworthiness of customer reviews. The rating-only reviews are at the lowest level of intimacy, including no reviewer name, validation, or text.

Higher levels of review intimacy include purchase verification, reviewer names (beyond a meaningless alias), review text, and possibly even review media (photos and/or videos). When I see the same text in multiple reviews, I get suspicious. The more comprehensive the review is, the harder it is to fake, and the more I could trust it.

At the highest level of intimacy are reviews from people I know personally. Those are people I would trust the most, but their reviews will likely be delivered in person rather than over a website, and there is a lower likelihood that they have experienced the product I'm about to purchase and be able to recommend it to me.

Finally, the third consideration is the platform on which the reviews are posted. I tend to be very sceptical of reviews posted on the website of the company selling the products or services because those companies can filter negative reviews out (possibly leaving a token number of negative reviews for "credibility") and are incentivized to do so. A neutral platform, such as BBB, has no "skin in the game" and could be trusted not to bias the reviews published on their website.

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About the Author

Dr Yoram Solomon is the author of *The Book of Trust* and host of *The Trust Show Podcast*, committed to helping companies and individuals build trust and become trustworthy. He published 14 books, 22 patents, more than 300 articles, and was one of the creators of Wi-Fi and USB 3.0. Named one of the Top 40 Innovation Bloggers and one of the Top 20 Global Thought Leaders on Corporate Culture.

Yoram is a professional member of the National Speakers Association, and was a TEDx speaker and host. He is an adjunct professor at Southern Methodist University. His trust-building model is based on years of original research and service at the IDF 35th Airborne Brigade.

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Paul Sloane

Get someone else to do the work

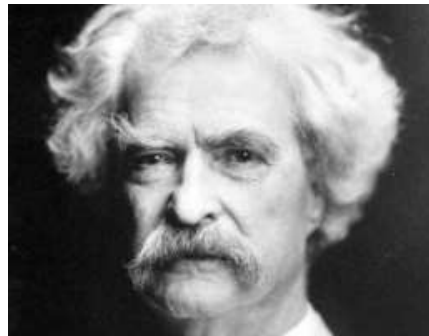


One of the most famous scenes from Mark Twain's book, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, is when Tom has to whitewash a fence as a punishment. His friend Ben Rogers comes along to ridicule him about having to work. Tom ignores him and concentrates on painting, so Ben eventually asks if he likes doing it. Tom replies, "Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?" When Ben asks if he could have a go Tom reluctantly agrees and eventually, he has a gang of boys pay him small amounts for the privilege of painting the fence. It is an example of lateral thinking in action. Tom turned the situation around by persuading Ben and the other boys to feel pleased to get the chance to paint the fence.

In years gone by you had to queue at the airport check-in desk so that the clerk could register your details and print your boarding card.

Then someone had a bright idea. Get the passenger to enter all their details on their home computer, choose their seat and print a boarding pass on their home printer. This saved time for passengers without luggage to check. It also saved the airline the task of checking them in. The airline had transferred part of the job to the customer. It was a

win-win and became universally adopted as a better practice.



Mark Twain

It is reported that wild crows have been enlisted to pick up discarded cigarette butts **from the streets of Stockholm in Sweden**. The birds are rewarded with food every time they drop a cigarette butt into a receptacle which includes an automatic peanut dispenser. It is believed that using the birds could save 75% of the current costs of clearing up cigarette butts in the city. The crows are quick learners and do not eat the rubbish.

Experts estimate that crows have the reasoning skills of a seven-year-old child.

Maybe you cannot get a crow, or another animal, or a customer or a gang of boys, to do part of your work, but there is probably someone you can ask. Analyse all the low-value tasks that you spend time on and ask whether it would be smarter to get someone else to do the job. Should you be

spending time on bookkeeping, website maintenance, arranging appointments or phoning suppliers? Would it be better to pay a specialist to do these jobs while you focus on what you are really good at and get paid for? Even better can you get someone to do it for free – like Tom Sawyer did?

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About the Author

Paul Sloane is an author and expert on lateral thinking in business. He has delivered hundreds of talks to executive audiences around the world. His talks are different because they challenge your thinking head-on. He is a skilled facilitator and course leader who helps top-level teams achieve breakthrough results in their meetings. He helps companies overcome the problems they have making innovation happen. He can improve creativity and lateral thinking for leaders with leadership and innovation master classes. This results in more agile culture, more ideas and successful innovation.

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Jeff Eilertsen

How to create highly effective service standards



Setting service standards is an approach commonly used to create consistent levels of service performance and enhance customer experience. Yet this practice is often disappointing, and at times even counter-productive. **Why?**

Performance and process standards can be useful for compliance and short-term training, but they do not generate the understanding or appetite for long-term improvements in customer experience.

Rigorous use of standards may ensure adherence to precise processes, but will not focus service providers' curiosity or attention on what customers may really value. Process standards can also quickly become outdated as systems and technology evolve, and are thus often merely tolerated, or ignored. And in some cases, process standards can make the customer experience worse, by driving staff to robotically deliver a uniform baseline experience while ignoring unique opportunities to delight individual customers.

The core problem lies in not recognizing there are **two types of service standards**, each with its own purpose and value: standards of *process* and standards of *experience*. Rather than leveraging each type uniquely, companies often confuse the two or fail to create one or the other. How do these two types of service standards differ? And how

can you make the best use of each?

1. Standards of service process

These standards can be created and deployed at a transactional level by identifying vital transactions on the **customer journey** and creating specific expectations for team or system performance. These standards have a “do this” format and may be clearly expressed in checklists, scripts or metrics that ensure consistent service process and performance. Some simple examples:

- Answer the phone within 3 rings.
- Greet each customer by their first name.
- Respond to every customer inquiry within 60 minutes.
- Open a new queue if more than 3 customers are waiting.
- Check each passenger has their seat belt fastened.
- Resolve a client's problem within 4 hours.
- Follow up on each complaint resolution within 24 hours.
- Ask each client to complete a feedback survey before they leave.

These **standards of service process** can be useful for:

- Establishing a clear understanding of expected performance in specific transactions so staff know *what* to do.
- Creating consistency in service delivery across all staff and locations.

- Increasing efficiency and safety for customers.
- Training new staff members.
- Coaching and correcting ongoing staff performance.

But there are can be pitfalls when using standards of service process, too. For example:

- If process standards are not reviewed and adjusted, they may become outdated and no longer deliver minimum customer expectations of service.
- Process standards can become focused on ensuring compliance to internal pre-defined steps versus thinking about how to exceed expectations or respond in unusual situations. It becomes commonplace for team members to “complete the checklist” yet still have an unimpressed or unhappy customer.
- Reports and metrics can focus attention on meeting targets for internal work, and not meeting aspirations for delighting or wowing external customers.

2. Standards of customer experience

Customer experience service standards transcend specific transactions and focus attention on the overall customer experience. These standards are more inspirational by nature and call forth the positive emotions we all experience when our customers are being well-served.

Customer experience standards provoke staff members to look beyond routines and find ways to create unique, delightful, and even extraordinary experiences. Focusing on standards for positive customer experience can encourage, enable, and empower team members to “**Unleash the Unbelievable!**”

Standards of customer experience are also useful to guide staff behaviour when unpredictable situations arise. It may not be possible to have process standards for every customer circumstance, preference, or request. Clear standards for customer experience thus liberate and encourage staff members to act with their own best abilities, instincts, and talents.

When creating standards of experience, you stand in the customer’s shoes and ask: What do we want it to look like, or feel like, when our customers are truly supported, encouraged, appreciated, acknowledged, “wowed” or even “blown away.” Examples of standards of customer experience are:

- We make each customer feel like a guest in their own home
- We treat each patient like they are our own mother
- We make each moment matter
- We give each customer the time they desire to solve problems
- Each customer feels they are the most important
- Our customers can ask any staff member for help with any question
- Customers leave each interaction with a smile

3. Combining standards of process and standards of experience to engage staff and delight customers

Utilizing both types of service standards is the best practice for creating predictable process performance and exceptional customer experience.

Experience standards clarify the emotional response we want our customers to enjoy. Process standards are internal “how-to’s”

that lead to this experience in specific situations.

It is essential to define your standards of customer experience first. Engage teams who work close to the customer in these conversations. Once service experience standards are agreed upon and articulated, then specific standards of the process can be derived to achieve that experience within your most important customer transactions.

Here is a simple example of a hotel’s standard of experience working in tandem with the standards of the process:

Hotel experience standard: Make each customer feel like a guest in their own home.

Sample process standards for service staff at the hotel reception:

- Bend down to speak with children at their eye level.
- Speak slowly and clearly with non-native language speakers.
- Walk slowly alongside elderly guests to guide them to their room.

Experience standards will not change often unless there is a major shift in service strategy or brand. Process standards must be reviewed and updated regularly to keep up with changing customer expectations, the introduction of new products, changes in technology, as well as competitive experiences and innovations.

This two-part approach to effective standards can be easy to implement and gain traction within an organization. Involving your teams in both steps promotes awareness of the customer perspective and the importance of standard process. This approach also encourages each team member to delight customers in our ever-changing world by using experience standards as a guiding light for action, with process standards created to assist but not disable.

What are your standards for customer service experience? How up-to-date and appropriate are your standards for the service process?

To learn more about Unleashing Unbelievable!, including guidelines and tools for creating your service standards, [click here](#) to know more about becoming an **Uplifting Service Leader**.

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About the Author

Jeff leads Client Success and Global Education for Uplifting Service, bringing 25 years of experience improving service and leadership. He is a Master Trainer and speaker, working with organizations on every continent.

He has supported large-scale service culture change efforts and facilitated service leadership and service excellence workshops with clients in numerous industries, working in over 30 countries in North America, Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe and the Middle East.

Jeff leads live and virtual workshops for leaders and teams to improve service performance and uplift customer experience. And he supports organizations to develop systems and practices that ensure sustained service culture change. He uses a collaborative style to build long-term working relationships with an emphasis on service and results, consistently exceeding client expectations.

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Barry Urquhart

The DNA of business



Well developed foundations and building blocks anchor structures. Durability is a consequence. The pyramids in Egypt are a classic case study.

In commerce, organisational structures are not as stable and as enduring. The need for adaptability is recognised and accepted. What is often missing is a core, from which values, virtues, relevance, and resonance emanate, which is lacking or deficient. This highlights the need to determine, define and articulate a *purpose*.

Innovation, technological change, disruption, and outright creativity necessitate malleability, flexibility if you will. Those attributes can be design features that complement, not replace the importance of a business's foundation.

They seldom necessitate the need to change the foundations, core, and purpose materially and structurally. Broaden and re-orient such, certainly.

Over millennia, countless bridge structures have collapsed. Tolerance, for mobility, was in-built. Permanence was not. Societies and businesses need both.

In recent times religions have seemingly ossified. Modern cult movements have disappeared, arguably by the process of self-destruction. Often the foundation

centres on the individual, the founder. Shortened lifecycles and mortality come into play. Such *leaders* fail to differentiate mortality from the attributes of being eternal.

The overview reflects the words and title of the US radio feature, hosted by John Doremus: "The Passing Parade"

The speed of that passing is accelerating.

RESPECTING THE CHARTERS

Boards of Directors and Advisory Boards are philosophically given the charter to ensure financial prudence, ensuring persistence, achieving resonance and relevance, and retaining the capacities of growth, innovation, and change.

Typical board compositions and competencies do limit capacities because the insufficient emphasis is given to capabilities. Investments in operational and technological hardware are seldom matched with outlays on software, i.e., human beings.

Organisations exist, adapt, develop, and achieve through people. Better people make for better organisations, particularly under good leadership.

However, the influence of each is typically short-term.

"OPEN" BUSINESS

The COVID pandemic has been a prime catalyst for organisations embracing "open" design offices, WFH (working from home), "open" cloud computer systems, "open" multi-channel communication networks and online real-time interactions with suppliers, distributors and collaborating associates.

Less open are delegated authorities, personal interaction (internal and external), risk-taking and resourcing for innovation change and new products, services, and applications.

As a result, emphasis is given to increased internal efficiencies and productivity.

External effectiveness, founded on relationships, repeat, loyal and referred business, has floundered somewhat. So too has originality.

Not surprisingly, morale is down and attrition throughout the workforce continues to increase.

Better balance between the tactical and the strategic will facilitate greater stability and durability.

DOUBLE HELIX

Beyond the hallowed halls of academia and scientific laboratories, few people can attempt to visualise the double helix of their own DNA, the core of their very existence.

Leadership and management teams in commerce exhibit similar characteristics and dispositions. Consequently, entities can “drift” in the marketplace and rapidly expire.

That can, and does, raise justifiable questions among team members, associates, suppliers, and existing, prospective, and past clients.

Innovations, adaptations and changes to products, services, product/service lines, perform best in the short, intermediate, and longer terms when they are attached to and anchored by strong DNA.

Remember, *purpose promotes pride*.

TAKE TWO

Invaluable insights were recently gleaned from an unstructured interaction with the leader of a religious-based community group whose prime purpose was to engage with people, many of whom were homeless, unemployed, and dependent (to varying degrees) on a range of drugs.

His and the entity's endeavour was to have the targeted people re-integrate into society, families, and local communities.

The complexities and vagaries of the pandemic have affected financial supporters, contributing health professionals and the operators of essential infrastructure amenities.

Income was trending down. So to the pool of resources. Reaching out and connecting with those in the targeted audience proved more difficult.

Engaging with all and sundry seems to be a step too far.

An extended session in which the DNA and purpose were reviewed, analysed and tentatively recalibrated, was energising.

The principal activities and resources of the entity were ultimately identified to be and accepted by activities and resources – not the purpose.

What evolved was the realisation that the purpose of the community group was.... *purpose*.

That is, to provide *purpose* for the intended recipients, (clients, customers, patients or whoever) was illuminating and provided a purpose to approach and re-approach sponsors, financial supporters, medical and health professionals and infrastructural amenity owners and operators.

They felt rewarded and engaged by accepting, endorsing and contributing their purpose to the endeavours.

The recipients responded positively and enjoyed enhanced self-worth because of an acceptance of them having a specific... purpose.

ARRESTING STATEMENT

Websites, submissions, and literature that declare and detail company/entity DNA which centre on relevance, advantages and benefits to existing and prospective clients are compelling in their appeal.

When the focus is external, interest is stimulated, and value is enhanced.

CONCLUSIONS:

In many instances, the activities that occupy the time and attention of many seem meaningless. When the *purpose* is identified, defined, embraced, articulated, and implemented a new, fulfilling realm materialises.

That progress is, well, *purposeful*.

It also underscores the fact that the purpose of a business is seldom if ever, to make a profit.

That profit is a consequence of attaining and sustaining the *purpose*. The better and more often you do that, the more profit you make.

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About the Author:

Barry Urquhart, Managing Director, Marketing Focus, Perth, is an inspiring speaker, author of Australia's top two selling books on customer service and an international consultant on dynamic innovation and creativity.

Barry is the author of six books, including the two largest selling publications on service excellence in Australasia. His latest is “*Marketing Magic – Streetsmart Marketing*”. He is a regular commentator on consumer issues on ABC radio, is featured on a series of interview topics on “Today Tonight” and contributes articles to 47 magazines throughout the world. His latest presentation is: “*Insights on ‘The Big Picture’ - Future-Proof Your Business*”.

He is one of Australia's most active keynote speakers and is an internationally recognised authority on quality customer service, consumer behaviour and creative visual merchandising. Marketing Focus is a Perth based market research and strategic planning practice. The firm and Barry consult with multinational, national and local entities in the private sector and the public sector. He is a former lecturer in Marketing and Management at the Curtin University of Technology and has degrees in marketing, political science and sociology.

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Greg Satell

There are important lessons we should learn from the war in Ukraine



The war in Ukraine is, in so many ways, an unspeakable tragedy. An unprovoked attack by a cynical power, continuous and barbaric shelling of innocent civilians and what may be the largest refugee crisis in history, makes us recalibrate what humans are capable of. And all of this, for the most part, to satisfy the hubris of one man.

Yet despite the horrors, I am hopeful. In the 20 years, I have been involved with Ukraine, I have seen it evolve from a kleptocratic post-communist state to an emerging democracy with the power to inspire the world. I could not have imagined, when I first fell in love with the place all those years ago, what has come to pass.

The truth is that Ukraine has much to teach us beyond the mighty courage and spirit we see on our TV screens. The reason Ukrainians fight so bravely is because they have struggled so long and hard. It is because of that struggle that they know what they are fighting for. That's why, despite the cold calculations by armchair strategists, Ukraine defies expectations.

The Orange Revolution – A Nation Awakens

When I first arrived in Ukraine the political apathy was palpable, especially in comparison to

Poland, where I had been living. After 80 years of communism and then 10 more under the kleptocratic rule, few thought change was possible. So why worry or complain about things that you couldn't do anything about anyway? It seemed better to focus on things close to you; your family, your work, your friends.

That changed in 2004. The opposition candidate for president, a relatively boring technocratic reformer named **Viktor Yushchenko**, was poisoned by pro-Russian agents. He survived, but his face was permanently disfigured and many thought it would end his campaign. Instead, it was invigorated. He appeared on TV and pointed to the damage, screaming, "Look at my face!"

At that moment, the once mild-mannered banker was transformed into an inspirational leader. The forces backing his opponent, an almost cartoonish thug named **Viktor Yanukovich**, tried to falsify the election, which led to the **Orange Revolution**. I remember that, at first, the effort often seemed futile. But we persevered and the Supreme Court of Ukraine nullified the falsified election results. Yushchenko rose to the presidency.

It was an astonishing transformation in a mere matter of months. If the regime had



Picture Source: <https://wordpress.org/openverse/image/210252f7-9d21-4d6b-9a94-aa73ecb8918d>

chosen a somewhat more suitable candidate, or at least not poisoned the leader of the opposition, things could have gone very differently. But it was too much. Even in a corrupt, post-Soviet state, there are limits to impropriety. The insults to dignity were just too extreme for the people to accept. Against the odds, they rebelled and won.

The Second Rise Of Yanukovich And The Failure To Survive Victory

For the temerity of the Ukrainians to choose their own president, **Putin shut off the gas**. Yushchenko's presidency sputtered and, when the financial crisis hit in 2008, the reformist agenda lost credibility. Viktor Yanukovich, the same man that we took to the streets to keep out of power, won a legitimate election and took office.

He was even worse than we had feared. His presidency wasn't so much a reign as it was an insatiable grab. He changed the Constitution to grab more power and threw his opponent, **Yulia Tymoshenko**, in jail to cripple the opposition. And the grab for money—symbolized by his tastelessly extravagant **Mezhyhirya estate**—was obscene, even for Ukraine.

So by 2013, Viktor Yanukovich had consolidated political power and proved to be a model of avarice and incompetence. Corruption reached new heights (experts estimate that the regime looted as much as \$100 billion—an amount almost equal to the entire GDP of Ukraine). Scandals, epitomized by the heinous case of Oksana Makar, began to pile up.

Things came to a head when Yanukovich backed out of a trade agreement with the EU. It was the final straw. It is one thing to steal, to make a mockery of the rule of law and run the country far below any reasonable standard of competence. But the prospect of EU integration had come to symbolize inclusion into Europe and a chance to, someday, live a normal life.

Once again, it was too much.

A Revolution Of Dignity Forged Through Shared Values

When Yanukovich announced that he would not go through with the EU trade agreement, a young journalist and activist named Mustafa Nayem, was moved to post this on Facebook, calling people to go return to Independence Square, the scene of the Orange Revolution, commonly known as the “Maidan:”

Okay guys, let's get serious. Who's ready to go to the Maidan today at midnight? "Likes" will not be counted. Only comments under this post with the words "I'm ready." Once there are more than a thousand, we will organize it.

In the space of an hour, there were more than 600 comments and Nayem posted once again that they would meet at 10:30. Within hours, more than a thousand people showed up to protest. In the ensuing days, the crowds swelled further. First 10,000, then 50,000 and before long, the protesters had set up camps. They were in it for the long haul. The Euromaidan protests had begun.

The regime fought back but to little avail. Riot police attacked, yet more people came to the Maidan. Yanukovich passed a law outlawing the protests and even more came. Things escalated and the regime started shooting the protestors. Soon there were Molotov cocktails, helmets, and improvised shields. In the end, more than 100 people were dead in the streets.

The world took notice and the diplomats came. Meanwhile, away from the cameras, other meetings were held in Parliament. The President's allies in the Party of Regions had enough and were ready to defect. The oligarchs, facing sanctions against their western assets, were through with him as well. Suddenly bereft of any support, Yanukovich fled from the country.

These events came to be known as the Revolution of Dignity, because it was the moment that the Ukrainian people demanded to have their sovereignty as an independent country recognized, no matter what the cost. That's what led Putin to annex Crimea, invade Donbas in 2014 and then the entire country in 2022.

Strategy Is More Than A Game Of Chess

We tend to imagine people will act rationally and that, by taking their interests into account, we can come to some sort of reasonable strategy. Yet the events in Ukraine belie that basic assumption. At each point Putin's cold calculations resulted in the opposite of what he wanted, pushing Ukraine further and further out of his grasp. As I explained in *Harvard Business Review* after the events of 2014, strategy is more than a game of chess.

Consider the ultimatum game. One player is given a dollar and needs to propose how to split it with another player. On a rational basis, the second player would accept anything over a penny, but decades of experiments across different cultures show that's not true. People will reject an offer that offends their dignity.

Putin could have accepted Yushchenko, the opposition candidate for President in 2004, who was not, by any stretch of the imagination, anti-Russian, but he poisoned him instead and ignited the Orange Revolution. He could have accepted Ukraine's desire for closer trade relations with Europe, but he couldn't abide and triggered the Revolution of Dignity in 2014.

The original intention of the Ukrainian people was not to pull away from Russia, which many, if not most, considered a “brother” country, but to pursue a so-called “Finnish model” that would maintain good relations with both Russia and the west. Yet Putin could not bring himself to recognize the Ukrainians' desire for a separate and distinct identity.

That's why he launched a war that Russia cannot win and that the rest of the world found so repugnant that they levelled such crippling sanctions. Putin's actions will impoverish the Russian people and endanger the existence of his regime. It doesn't make any sense until you realize that Putin was also acting not on any rational basis, but because of how he has come to see his identity and place in the world.

It will likely be his undoing.

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Greg Satell is an international keynote speaker, adviser and bestselling author of *Cascades: How to Create a Movement that Drives Transformational Change*. His previous effort, *Mapping Innovation*, was selected as one of the best business books of 2017.

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Dee Blick

How you can put your prices up without losing customers



There comes the day when you realise that your expertise and experience are worth far more than you are currently charging. Or perhaps you've absorbed so many increased costs in a bid to remain competitive that your profit margin has diminished to the point where you have to increase your prices to stay in business.

The decision to increase your prices is usually met with anxiety. How will your existing customers react?

They have become accustomed to paying you a certain amount, have budgeted for your services or products and suddenly they're faced with paying more.

Here are 4 *tried and tested* ways you can manage a price increase and hold onto most of your customers.

- **Instead of immediately imposing a price increase on customers**, let them know you'll be increasing your prices a little further down the line so it gives them time to adjust to your news. People rarely respond well to negative news being sprung on them.
- **If possible, don't charge the full price increase** to your existing customers. Let them know that new customers will face the full increase, and tell them what

this will be to reassure them that because of their loyalty they'll still be getting a preferential rate.

- **Let your customers know of the additional things you do**, and will continue to do, but don't charge for. Don't assume that customers are aware of all of your nice touches.
- **Sniff out your competitors' charges.** If you're still price competitive after an increase you can be confident that if some clients do talk to competitors, they will most likely stay with you.

Of course, no matter how sensitively you handle the news of your price increase, you may still lose some customers, especially those for whom price is everything. Accept this. You can't please everyone!

Perhaps the best advice I can share with you is *to charge a fair price in the first place*. If you started your business charging a rock bottom price, although it may have suited you at the time in bringing customers to your door, it doesn't take long for you to become resentful that you're delivering so much for so little – and as a knee jerk consequence, you hike your prices, alienating many of your customers, surprised at the suddenness of the increase.

So stand in the shoes of your customers and handle the price increase process with care and sensitivity.

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About the Author

Dee is a Fellow of The Chartered Institute of Marketing. She is also a genuine Number 1 bestselling small business marketing author, regarded as one of the most respected and influential marketers in the UK. She's the author of 4 bestsellers including: *The 15 Essential Marketing Masterclasses for Your Small Business*; rated 'an excellent read' by The Sun Newspaper, CityAM, Elite Business Magazine and winner of the Bookbag non-fiction book award. It has been endorsed by The Chartered Institute of Marketing. Her previous book, *The Ultimate Small Business Marketing Book* has sold in excess of 20,000 copies to date and remains an Amazon top 10 bestseller six years down the line. Her book *The Ultimate Guide to Writing and Marketing a Bestselling Book on a Shoestring Budget* has won the Bookbag's Top 10 non-fiction books and The Guardian's top 10 reads for entrepreneurs.

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Amy Vetter

Unplug and disconnect: How to live a more mindful life

Do you think you can unplug for 24 hours? No cellphones. No technology at all. Just being present. And then think about how many times you check your phone throughout the day.

The average American spends an average of **ten hours** looking at a screen. Every. Single. Day.

We all need a break from technology. Disconnecting and unplugging from technology can help us clear our minds and reset. Spending time in front of a screen is not healthy, and going offline will do wonders for your overall wellness.

How to unplug even when it's tough

To truly unplug, take a break from all electronics and technologies. Disconnect from game apps, social media, email, etc. It's about putting away tech and making the conscious decision to be **mindful** of how you spend your time.

When you are constantly connected to technology, you miss what's happening around you. It's easy to get caught up in the constant news updates, what your friends are doing, and even what your favourite celebrity had for breakfast and lose focus on **what's important**.

Whether you decide to leave the country or stay at home on your couch, **unplugging** and relaxing can be a great way to improve your mental health.

At this point in human history, our lives are deeply entwined with technology. It's hard to resist the temptation of screens. I know it can be challenging to tear yourself away, even

temporarily. It's especially difficult because apps, websites, social media—it's all designed to keep you online for as long as possible. Because of this fact, you must be mindful and tactical in how you unplug.

Try taking a break from the digital world and think of it as an opportunity. Pay attention to your feelings. It may take some time to get comfortable, but I promise it is worth it.

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About the Author

Amy Vetter is an accomplished entrepreneur, business executive, national speaker, CPA, and yoga practitioner. She is also the author of *Business, Balance & Bliss: How the B³ Method Can Transform Your Career and Life*. As a third-generation woman entrepreneur, Amy has launched and sold multiple businesses including yoga studios, an accounting practice, and other business ventures. Amy has also held corporate leadership roles overseeing customer, sales, education, and marketing functions. Throughout her 20-plus years in business, Amy has learned valuable insights on how to achieve work-life harmony and live a more purposeful life.

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Sunil Bali

7 things to learn from a child...



7 things to learn from a child:

1. Be happy for no reason
2. Be totally immersed in whatever you're doing
3. Focus on now, not yesterday or tomorrow
4. Have no ego
5. Forgive quickly
6. Go where there is excitement
7. Stay where there is love



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About the Author

Sunil is a Performance Coach, Speaker and Author. Ex Head of Talent for Vodafone Group and Santander, and having run a £50m business, Sunil has been responsible for hiring over 50000 people and has had the pleasure of working with some great entrepreneurs, professionals and leaders.

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Adi Gaskell

Research explores the economic benefits of remote work during Covid-19



If you're a knowledge worker, the Covid-19 pandemic has almost certainly meant you have grown all too familiar with tools such as Zoom. The wholesale transition to remote working has by and large been successful, with **research suggesting** that productivity has largely been strong during the pandemic, even if there have been possible consequences for collaboration and innovation.

"If you have the right connectivity, remote working can increase the productivity across the team, but it certainly isn't without issues," Neil Parker, GM of EMEA at intelligent automation provider **Laiye** says. "When you haven't met someone the relationship is inevitably very different, so when you're tackling challenging situations, whether that's collaboration or more disciplinary issues, it can be difficult."

To a large extent, tools such as Zoom allowed knowledge workers to carry on much as before. A recent **study** from Kellogg Business School explores how things might have differed if the pandemic had struck before such tools were widely available.

Business as usual

The researchers analyzed the situation in seven countries, including the U.K., France, Germany, and the United States,

and perhaps understandably found that the economic impact of the pandemic would have been considerably greater if remote working wasn't such a seamless option.

They remind us that remote workers not only contributed via their labour but also via their economic spending. For instance, there was a significant increase in expenditure on office equipment as people adapted their homes for remote working.

The findings emerged after GDP data was collected for each country, alongside the number of people employed and the hours they put in each week. They also collected data on the expenditure people and their employers made on things such as office furniture and equipment, as well as using commercial electricity usage as a proxy for workplace utilization. Finally, they used mobility data from Google to gauge the number of hours each person worked in either their home or their workplace.

Declining output

The analysis found that GDP would likely have fallen by around twice as much during 2020 if remote working was not the option it ultimately was.

What was interesting, however, is that the productivity boom that many have argued materialized in the wake of the shift to remote

working was not really found in the data. The researchers explain that this claim only really held water if the only inputs were those associated with traditional workplaces, such as energy costs or office space.

In other words, it assumes that those things weren't also a cost when we worked from home, which of course is not the case. Once those costs were factored into our home working environment, the apparent productivity boom largely disappeared.

Who pays?

While some employers, such as Google, have provided employees with money to help them equip their home office environment, the majority have relied on employees themselves to foot the bill. The researchers believe that this has been an acceptable trade-off for many given the elimination of commuting costs caused by remote working. Should a more hybrid work pattern emerge that requires both a functioning remote workplace and commuting expenses, however, this bargain may begin to shift.

This has been helped by the fact that many home environments were reasonably well equipped for remote working, with investments in high-speed broadband to facilitate Netflix or online gaming also useful for remote working,

even if they weren't at all intended for such a purpose.

While the researchers weren't able to directly gauge whether people were more productive or not when they worked from home, they believe they were able to find a proxy to gauge the relative productivity of home versus in-person work. This proxy emerged when workplaces re-opened again and employers had the option of pulling people back into the office.

Returning to the office would obviously incur costs for the employer due to things such as social distancing and other health and safety measures, so if people were as productive at home then logically it would make sense for them to stay there.

A temporary shift

After analyzing data from the U.K. the researchers found that as expenses rose on things such as social distancing, buying masks for staff, and better ventilation, a growing number of firms sent employees home again, with this especially prominent in sectors such as professional services. Then, when costs returned to something like normal again, people were pulled back in.

The data clearly shows the benefits to organizations, and to the economy more broadly, of remote working during the pandemic, but it is as yet unclear whether the shift we saw during Covid restrictions will be sustained into the long term.

While there are clearly pros and cons to the situation, one aspect that is often not discussed enough is the shift in emphasis from our employer providing the tools and the workplace for us to function towards us providing these things. The researchers argue that this weakens our ties to our employer and creates a more gig-like relationship whereby we're largely responsible for our own equipment.

This could be especially so if our connections with our colleagues are also weakened, with various studies showing that onboarding has suffered during the pandemic, as has the collaboration and innovation that comes from deep connectivity with our peers. This may also limit our promotional prospects if we're less able to build relationships with our manager.

Remote working may have various appeals, but it would perhaps be prudent for people to be careful what they wish for, as it may also have various consequences that were not bargained for.

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About the Author

Adi Gaskell is an innovation writer and consultant who has worked with leading organisations from the private and public sectors, including Deloitte, DellEMC, GSK, the Ministry of Defence, InnovateUK, Government Office for Science and National Health Service. He writes regularly on business, innovation and technology for Forbes and the BBC, as well as academic publications such as the LSE Business Review. He has also contributed authored and ghost-written content for companies such as Salesforce, Alcatel, BBVA, HCL Technologies, Adobe and T-Mobile, as well as white papers and journal articles. He has an academic background in computing and artificial intelligence and studied innovation at the Tuck School of Business.

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